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## BROWNING AS A RELIGIOUS TEACHER.

## I.

RIGHTLY to estimate the extent and worth of a man's teaching and influence upon his time must always be a difficult matter, and especially so when he is a poet, and his day our own. Time, and time alone, can fix the due proportion of his mental stature, and give the true perspective to his position among the great teachers of the world. And if it is true that a man can only be judged rightly by his peers, it must remain a hopeless task for one generation to fix adequately the poet's place and claim to permanent recognition. But though the task is doubly difficult with a writer of so essentially an intellectual and unusual type as Browning, yet there are other sides than the purely poetic one upon which it is easier to approach him, and of which the men and women of his own day, who owe most to him of help and guidance in their mental and spiritual life, may be forgiven for attempting some rough generalisation.

It is especially difficult, as I have said, to estimate a poet's influence, for teaching is not his first and ostensible object, and he might justly disclaim any intention to dogmatise and instruct. But in so far as he is the true poet, he is also the seer. It is not merely that he gives a melodious and satisfying utterance to the dumb emotions of commonplace life and people, but he has gone beyond his fellows in the world of thought or imagination. He is in truth a seer, whose mental vision has pierced through the outer husks of circumstance, whose perception is quicker and keener than other men's for the subtler unseen elements hidden beneath the tangible objects of life, for the union underlying its discords; and whose emotions are probably deeper and more penetrating in proportion to his deeper insight. He shares the common life of other men and women, and treads the ordinary human paths of happiness or misery, but to him they are instinct with a meaning they do not possess for ordinary men. His ears are attuned to catch the music of the spheres, his eyes see the common human lot in "the light of setting suns diffused," and one essential difference between ordinary men, who perhaps have one or two such moments of inspiration in their lives,

and the poet is that he has the gift of expression which fixes and crystallises such passing moments and emotions into an enduring form capable of renewing the emotion afresh, while they

. . . . come back and cannot tell the world.

When the poet comes back, whether he speaks of the "secrets of the prison-house," or the common loves and sorrows of our life, he brings to them some of the magic of the unseen from which he comes; and in the reflected light of his "undiscovered country" plain men and women can recognise and feel a depth and meaning in their lives, undreamed of before, which infuses a new dignity into the commonest incidents of their lot.

For, don't you mark ? we're made so that we love  
First when we see them painted, things we have passed  
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see ;  
. . . . Art was given for that ;  
God uses us to help each other so,  
Lending our minds out.<sup>1</sup>

And like some far traveller who returns to tell of all the marvels and wonders his eyes have actually seen, so the poet holds his listening crowd, and if they cannot follow in imagination and faith as far as his sight has gone, at least they catch from his voice and words intimations of another world than theirs, and recognise the limitations of their own surroundings. And were it only for this, were the task of the poet simply to remain a witness for the reality of things unseen, his influence would be almost incalculable in an age when the struggle for existence, power, place or position consumes the greater part of men's lives and energies.

But, whatever may be the case with other poets, Browning's aim and its accomplishment goes far indeed beyond this. He is not a poet merely, he is a dramatic poet, and he is a thinker. Human nature, in conflict with human life and circumstance, is the subject of his drama, the world is his stage, men and women, with their passions and their sorrows, their crimes and heroisms, are his *dramatis personæ*. His interest in them is absorbing and vivid, to him nothing is "common or unclean," it is all instinct with meaning, and "it means intensely." Beyond the stage, beyond the actual drama we see in action there and follow with interest for its own sake, lies the source and meaning of the whole. We stand with him in the dark

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<sup>1</sup> *Fra Lippo Lippi.*

and silent auditorium, and long before the curtain falls we feel

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them as we will.

It is upon this he has been concentrating our attention, this he sees ever moving there below the small strife and fret of human life and circumstance, and below each outward form of man or woman, which hides and yet reveals the mysterious essence of individual life within. And Browning is essentially a modern and the true poet of his time in this, that the attitude of his mind towards the problems of existence is philosophical. In this partly lies the cause of some of his highest achievements, and also of that overwhelming and obscuring of the form which is also perhaps his greatest defect. He is not content with offering occasional propitiatory oblations to the blind forces crossing men's paths, and violently altering or shattering their destinies in an unforeseen and arbitrary manner. To him life has a central meaning, a meaning too deep and infinite for the mind of man to pierce: but what he was set on earth for, and what should be his final aim in life, is to seek the utmost limit of such knowledge attainable (though by the very nature of our being and lot, no absolute knowledge is possible, or possibly even desirable), and to bring his finite life and will into conformity with the greater infinite will and meaning lying beyond. In short, it is his duty to accomplish himself and his true being in this life as fully as it lies within his power to do so. No one perhaps before has ever helped educated men and women, as Browning has, to a right estimation of what constitutes the *real* and permanent, among the perishing yet obtruding shows and circumstances of life.

Yet we must not look to him for any elaborate metaphysical system, nor for anything approaching to the laborious following up of abstract ideas, or their metaphysical expression. He is first and essentially a poet, and real life, whether of action or feeling, and the struggles of men and women are what first interest him. With him philosophy is apparently rather an attitude of mind than a definite study. This has been well defined by a writer<sup>1</sup> (the importance of whose work to a full understanding of the poet must be gratefully acknowledged) in the passages which follow.

"To show that Mr. Browning is a metaphysical poet, is to show that he is not a metaphysical *thinker*, though he is a

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Sutherland Orr, *Handbook to Robert Browning's Works*.

thinker whose thought is metaphysical so far as principle goes. . . . It is essential to bear in mind that Mr. Browning is a metaphysical poet and not a metaphysical thinker, to do justice to the depth and originality of his creative power, for his imagination includes everything, which, at a given moment, a human being can think or feel, and often finds itself, therefore at some point to which other minds have *reasoned* their way."

Nor must we expect to find in Browning any assertion of religious dogma, or the profession of any distinct religious creed. Dogma, to speak frankly, does not appear to interest him, except as illustrating the various ways in which light and inspiration can reach men's souls. It is the human effect rather than the dogma itself which even there apparently arrests his attention; and should we come to a study of his works prepared to find in him the apologist or teacher of any special creed or form of religion, though many scattered passages in his writings would encourage our hopes, we should have missed, I venture to think, the real key-note of the whole, and the message he has to give us. His deeply religious attitude of mind strikes us no less than the bold confidence with which he seeks truth *everywhere*, rather than within the confines of any creed, however wide. His was too deep a passion and too wide a range of sympathy to be held within the hedges and palisades of dogma, which weaker men have wisely built around themselves as props and defences. It is obvious that any such absolute and definite limitation which, though framed as a support, implies by its existence not only a pause in development, but a barrier of separation between man and man, was not in harmony with the mind of the poet, who saw growth and development everywhere, and in everything, from the stars in their courses to the worm beneath his foot, recognised the manifestation of God himself in his two attributes of Power and Love, fulfilling himself "in many ways."

That Browning is to many a deep and powerful spiritual force, and in very truth a religious teacher of the highest order can no longer be denied. That in his writings we must look for the spirit and essence of belief rather than the clearly defined form is equally clear. And it will be well therefore, whatever our own personal religious convictions may be, to endeavour to lay them so far aside that we can follow for the time being where the poet has led the way, and try to form for ourselves, however inadequately, some general view of the root of the faith which inspired a long life, and found such noble and triumphant expression at its close:—

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,  
 Never doubted clouds would break,  
 Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,  
 Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,  
 Sleep to wake.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps no other five consecutive lines of his poems touch on so many characteristic and salient points of his teaching, and they therefore form a good introduction to its closer study. They show his courageous optimism, his absolute faith in the triumph of good over evil, the splendid width shown in his views of apparent failure and success in this life, which proceed from the faith in immortality underlying them—a faith which implies the belief that this life is only one stage in a progress of infinite development.

Leaving then the debateable region of dogma behind, what is it which first strikes us in Browning's theory of life, and which finds a continuous expression in his works from the

I believe in God and truth  
 And love ;

in the immature "Pauline" to this "Epilogue" which so touchingly closes the last volume ; an expression only growing stronger and more triumphant towards the close? It is surely an unswerving and deeply-rooted faith in the fact of God's existence, and the ultimate victory of good over evil. A robust and ever-present faith—which breathes through the whole of his writings, and is the more striking in an age which to many appears to have passed through the convulsions of doubt, only to be lulled into indifferentism. And so strong is it, and so unshaken the calm consciousness of power which springs from it, that it can accept even doubt itself as an auxiliary and almost necessary consequence of its own existence, and hails the apparently confusing discoveries of science as only new contributions to the force of truth. And the vitality of this faith is shown in the way it dominates his whole view of life, and seems to centralise every other aspect of thought, and weld the different spheres of thought and experience into a living whole. What to so many men and women seems nothing, in ordinary happy moments, but a tranquil opinion, is to him a vital essence, fusing whatever it touches, and touching every side and every particle of life : in fact, implicit in life itself and finding its highest expression in man.

And this central fact once secure, what a new world "swims into our ken," what a robust and healthy optimism is the

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<sup>1</sup> *Epilogue in Asolando.*

result, an optimism wholly unlike the more common one of a satisfied emotionalism. When it finds expression in Browning's writings it carries a deeper meaning than the words alone convey, for the consciousness is ever present with us of the rock from whence it was hewn, the foundations on which it stands. If to him the world is all right, at least we know why—

God's in His Heaven,  
All's right with the world

sang Pippa.

This world's no blot for us,  
Nor blank, it means intensely, and means good

says Fra Lippo Lippi, and again in "The Guardian Angel" the poet speaks in his own person—

O world, as God has made it ! All is beauty :  
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty.  
What further may be sought for or declared ?

And here, before going further, it will be well to examine briefly the form under which we have to seek the expression of Browning's views of life, in which his own faith and its teaching lies. Throughout his volumes the occasions when he speaks in his own person are few, though perhaps they number among them some of the most beautiful of all his poems, notably "By the Fireside." He is, as we have said, a dramatic poet, though the form adopted is an unconventional one. Still in its essence his poetry is dramatic. Men and women are what interest him chiefly in life, the problems involved in the clash of their personalities and circumstance, the problems of human beings in friction with each other, and human nature in friction with itself ; the problems, in fact, of life, of character and thought. And these clothe themselves in the most distinctive and different shapes and personalities, and if in his prefatory poem he speaks of his fifty men and women we can now add a far larger number to them. And while noticing the incisive distinctness of type, and the clearest individuality in his *dramatis personæ*, the wide range of sympathy and high dramatic power displayed in their delineation, we are equally struck with the strong subjective vein running through all his characters, and putting into their distinctive utterances a touch which is only of the poet himself, and is born of his own deeply-rooted philosophy of life. The characteristics are too strong in all his ideal portraits for any possibility of confusion ; his men and women stand out boldly, whether historical or ideal, as the great ones of the past against the misty background of time. Whether

the pathetic figure of the nameless poet of Valladolid who had passed

Through a whole campaign of the world's life and death,  
Doing the King's work all the dim day long,<sup>1</sup>

or the great of history, from Saul to Strafford, they live equally distinctly for us, and we scarcely question the reality of the portraiture, or whether or no they had actually moved across the world's stage.

This being the case, it adds a double point to the other almost equally distinct expression and portraiture running through them all of the mind of the poet himself. His view of life, the meaning of its riddle, his faith in the unseen, of which this world is but one of many expressions, lies below, and is involved in all the varying expressions of human life before us. Passed in review they seem as clearly the many facets of the one transparent whole as each is distinctive in itself. It would be interesting and instructive, did space allow, to run through even the bare subject of each poem, as illustrative of the points in life which interested the poet, and were deliberately chosen by him. Of course, in utterances of a dramatic kind, the temptation is obvious of forcing or wresting them unfairly to suit or prove a preconceived view, and it is principally for this reason that I venture to think a review of the whole, *as a whole*, of importance. Browning, himself, in a note to the *Dramatic Lyrics*, probably as well known as his poems themselves, guards against a misuse of the sentiments he puts into the mouths of his characters. He speaks of the poems as "though often Lyric in expression, always Dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine."

In face of such a clear disclaimer, it is obvious that the greatest care should be taken against wresting quotations, and it is only such views as seem to underlie each separate instance, and are the groundwork of them all and clearly characteristic of the writer, which we have any excuse for presenting as our own debt to him as a teacher. That such and such views of life, and such and such faith is to be found even through the speech of some of his ideal characters, no attentive student of his writings will question, though probably in each case they will be modified by the individual views and temperament of the reader. He himself seems to admit it, in the very poem to which the note is appended, when he says :—

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<sup>1</sup> *How it Strikes a Contemporary.*



Love, you saw me gather men and women,  
Enter each and all, and use their service,  
Speak from every mouth,—<sup>1</sup>

And in dedicating this special collection of poems to his wife it is difficult not to believe that the impulse which prompted him was the closely personal interests which were expressed through the mouths of his men and women.

To return then to our inquiry into these steadfast and apparently subjective views which seem to underlie each varying expression. It would be needless to add quotations or evidence to prove this first and unshaken belief in God's existence. It is the key-note of the whole, and is reflected in almost everything he wrote, and it will be well to study it rather more in its details and conclusions, which will lead us back at the end to the completed chord of faith.

God, then, exists, and rules the world and life; men are his children, they are the clay and he the potter, time and circumstance the wheel on which they are shaped. His also is the natural order. Our knowledge of him, of ourselves, of the uses and meaning of the present existence is bounded by it, but, though full of apparent contradictions and wholly incomplete, it is not necessarily false, unless we make it so by judging of existence as a whole from our limited standpoint, and with our limited powers of observation :

Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable Name ?  
Builder and maker, Thou, of houses not made with hands !  
What, have fear of change from Thee who art ever the same ?  
Doubt that Thy power can fill the heart that Thy power expands ?  
There shall never be one lost good ! What was shall live as before :  
The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound ;  
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more ;  
On the earth the broken arcs, in the heaven, a perfect round.<sup>2</sup>

This leads us to one of his most characteristic views, on which he insists in all his more serious poems, and which underlies much of his lighter work, namely, the incompleteness of man's life, such as we know it, and the necessary incompleteness of his knowledge. Nowhere, perhaps, is Browning's strength greater, nor finds a more characteristic expression than in his attitude towards this stumbling-block of thought. He neither elevates the present life into the whole with the more modern materialists, and declines to consider or even acknowledge any outcome of experience or thought which cannot be tabulated and explained; nor does he degrade this life to a mere painful stage of probation, which it is sinful to care

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<sup>1</sup> *One Word More.*

<sup>2</sup> *Abt Vogler.*

greatly for or to rejoice in, with one section of earnest religionists to whom doubt is simply the tempting of the Evil One. His view, as we should expect, is something robuster and more spiritual than either. He fixes on the word "probation," and employs it in a wider sense. This world and life he recognises, as we have seen, as a part, possibly a small and obscure part, of a great whole, to which this is merely one stage of development. It is thus impossible for the creatures of a day, men cramped by the conditions of their temporal existence, to conceive of the whole. That is the attribute of God himself. Man can but believe that, could he do so, the contradictions of his present being and lot would disappear, and he would acquiesce in a complete moral order, of which he has here but fragmentary intuitions and knowledge.

It is only thus that the hardest problems of life can find their solution, and be faced with courage. Change, decay, and death, these are stern foes, obtruding themselves upon life at every turn, before whom all faith drops groundward unless equipped to face them.

Nothing can be as it has been before ;  
Better, so call it, only not the same.

Simple ? Why this is the old woe o' the world ;  
Tune to whose rise and fall we live and die.  
Rise with it, then ! Rejoice that man is hurled  
From change to change unceasingly,  
His soul's wings never furled !

That's a new question ; still replies the fact  
Nothing endures : the wind moans, saying so ;  
We moan in acquiescence : there's life's pact,  
Perhaps probation—do I know ?  
God does : endure his act !<sup>1</sup>

We cannot explain, we can but acquiesce in change, and its apparent sequel death, and the contradictions they involve. We must "moan" as we do so, unless some confidence is ours of a fixed point beyond them, and yet within ourselves, over which they are for ever powerless ; of a greater harmony which has power to include the discords. It is thus that Browning teaches us to think of them and yet "rejoice," in one of the finest poems and noblest expressions of faith in our language—<sup>2</sup>

Grow old along with me !  
The best is yet to be,  
The last of life, for which the first was made :  
Our times are in His hand  
Who saith "A whole I planned,  
Youth shows but half ; trust God : see all, nor be afraid !"

<sup>1</sup> *James Lee's Wife.*

<sup>2</sup> *Rabbi Ben Ezra.*

So he leads us, and we feel a new strength inspire us even at the outset. For he has found the fixed points over which age and death have no power, in God and the human soul, which, emanating from him, must become one with him again.

*Rejoice* we are allied  
To That which doth provide  
And not partake, effect and not receive!  
A spark disturbs our clod,  
Nearer we hold of God  
Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must believe.

Then welcome each rebuff  
That turns earth's smoothness rough,  
Each sting that bids not sit nor stand, but go!  
Be our joys three-parts pain —, etc.

This has struck a high courageous note! He recognises life as a field of ceaseless effort, a struggle from the lower to the higher; and man, despite his finite nature, as ultimately one with God—

Therefore I summon age,  
he says,  
To grant youth's heritage,  
Life's struggle having so far reached its term.  
Thence shall I pass, approved  
A man, for aye removed  
From the developed brute; a God though in the germ.

And I shall thereupon  
Take rest, e'er I be gone  
Once more on my adventures brave and new:  
Fearless and unperplexed,  
When I wage battle next,  
What weapons to select, what armour to endure.

So much for age—it has no terrors for him; and he adds with equal confidence—

Thou waitest age: wait death nor be afraid!  
Fool! All that is, at all,  
Lasts ever, past recall;  
*Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:*  
What entered into thee,  
That was, is, and shall be:  
Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay endure.

He fixed thee 'mid this dance  
Of plastic circumstance,  
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest:  
Machinery just meant  
To give thy soul its bent,  
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

Here, therefore, we have the spectacle of man in the bonds and boundaries of finite existence, yet conscious within himself of a spark of immortal life, over which they have no power: for ever doomed to be "looking forward to those things which are before," to lead a double existence in which flesh and spirit must be at warfare—

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what's a heaven for ——<sup>1</sup>

It is this intimation of immortality which, in varying forms, beneath the disguises of change, and decay, and doubt, is perpetually presented to us in Browning's writings. Fully to understand God would be to limit him to finite conditions, to make him in the likeness of man, and to degrade what is indeed the essence of faith itself. As he makes Johannes of Agricola say—

God whom I praise; how could I praise,  
If such as I might understand,  
Make out and reckon on His ways,  
And bargain for His love.

And this leads us to, perhaps, the most characteristic of all Browning's theories, drawn as it is from this belief that the life of man on earth is only one stage in his development—his view of doubt. His attitude towards it is one of singular boldness. To him it is, as we have said, almost an integral part of belief, under the conditions of our limited existence and knowledge. He faces it with a faith bolder than itself, a faith so vital and powerful that it dares to claim it as an auxiliary force. To him it is an ever-springing protest against the incompleteness of our life and knowledge as a final condition, which leads to "the assurance of things hoped for;" the perpetual emphasis of the contradictions of our existence, which is the most emphatic denial of their final reality.

And what is failure here, but a triumph's evidence  
For the fulness of the days? ——

he makes Abt Vogler say; and again in that wonderful poem, "A Death in the Desert," the dying ancient Apostle, prophetically confronting the new doubts which should arise in the world, accepts with equal power the necessary progress, even in the appreciation of truth, which must be reached through error. For as he says—

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<sup>1</sup> *Andrea del Sarto.*

— this gift of truth  
 Once grasped, were this our soul's gain safe, and sure  
 To prosper as the body's gain is wont,—  
 Why, man's probation would conclude, his earth  
 Crumbles; for he both reasons and decides,  
 Weighs first, then chooses: will he give up fire  
 For gold or purple once he knows its worth?  
 Could he give Christ up were His worth as plain?  
 Therefore, I say, to test man, the proofs shift,  
 Nor may he grasp that fact like other fact —

And again in a long argument he shows how man's place  
 stands midway between the lower perfection of the beast and  
 the highest perfection, God; that he is—

a thing nor God nor beast,  
 Made to know that he can know and not more:

While man knows partly but conceives beside,  
 Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact,  
 And in this striving, this converting air  
 Into a solid he may grasp and use,  
*Finds progress, man's distinctive mark alone,*  
 Not God's and not the beast's: God is, they are,  
 Man partly is, and wholly hopes to be.  
 Such progress could no more attend his soul  
 Were all it struggles after found at first  
 And guesses changed to knowledge absolute—

This being the case, why should doubt so shake our souls?  
 It is but one step in a certain progress towards the only  
 reality, truth—

Do I remonstrate: folly wide the mark!  
 Rather I prize the doubt  
 Low kinds exist without,  
 Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.<sup>1</sup>

It would be interesting, did space allow, to follow up the  
 poet's meaning as it is illustrated in one of the last poems of  
 the new volume, where he describes the deliverance of the  
 speaker from life in the perfect star Rephan, and proves  
 that perfection attained without struggle has no vitality or  
 existence. The poet's words alone will suffice—

No want—whatever should be, is now:  
 No growth—that's change— . . .

No hope, no fear: as to-day, shall be  
 To-morrow: advance or retreat need we  
 At our standstill through eternity?

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<sup>1</sup> *Rabbi Ben Ezra.*

No fellowship—

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Was it Thou, above all lights that are,  
Prime Potency, did thy hand unbar  
The prison-gate of Rephan my star?

\*       \*       \*       \*

I stagnated there where weak and strong,  
The wise and the foolish, right and wrong

Are merged alike in a neutral Best,  
Can I tell? No more than at whose behest  
The passion arose in my passive breast.

And I yearned for no sameness but difference  
In thing and thing, *that should shock my sense*  
*With a want of worth in them all, and thence*

*Startle me up, by an Infinite*  
*Discovered above and below me— . . .*

\*       \*       \*       \*

Enough: for you doubt, you hope, O men,  
You fear, you agonize, die: what then?  
Is an end to your life's work out of ken?

Have you no assurance that, earth at end,  
Wrong will prove right? Who made shall mend  
In the higher sphere to which yearnings tend?

Why should I speak? You divine the test—  
When the trouble grew in my pregnant breast  
A voice said "So wouldst thou strive, not rest?"

"Burn and not smoulder, win by worth,  
Not rest content with a wealth that's death?  
Thou art past Rephan, thy place be Earth!"

Here and now, as we have seen, our judgment of existence as a whole must be incomplete. We can but recognise a law of progress, and snatch at all such indications of the final order as are given us. And this leads us to one of the most important points in the poet's faith, and the large humanity which characterises his judgments of men and women. For the same reason, he says, it is impossible to judge from our limited standpoint of the ultimate failure and success of a man's life. "What are we set on earth for?" is a question which must be answered before we can attempt to judge whether or no each man has attained the object of his existence here. And as this object and its attainment is not bounded by our knowledge, our attitude should be one of extreme charity to our fellows. The remembrance of this should temper our proneness to judge hardly the motives and actions of other men and women, and should destroy the bigotry of the conventional moral judgment, which confines goodness and

the moral sphere within the limits of a philosophy or creed applicable only to certain conditions of life. Of all things the world's ordinary view of success is the most delusive—

All service ranks the same with God —  
With God whose puppets, best and worst,  
Are we : there is no last nor first.<sup>1</sup>

Its view of failure is even more shallow, and upon this Browning insists in poem after poem, though possibly it finds its highest expression in the words of Andrea del Sarto, the faultless painter—

I do what many dream of all their lives,  
—Dream? Strive to do, and agonise to do,  
And fail in doing. . . .  
Who strive—you don't know how the others strive  
\* \* \* \* \*  
Yet do much less. . . .  
Well, less is more, Lucrezia : I am judged.  
There burns a truer light of God in them,  
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,  
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt  
This low-pulsed forth-right craftsman's hand of mine.  
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,  
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,  
Enter and take their place there sure enough,  
Though they come back and cannot tell the world.  
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.  
\* \* \* \* \*  
In this world who can do a thing, will not ;  
And who would do it, cannot, I perceive :  
Yet the will's somewhat—somewhat, too, the power—  
And thus we half-men struggle—  
\* \* \* \* \*  
. . . . . What would one have ?  
In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance—

I have quoted more of the poem than would have sufficed for my purpose, which was to show how the idea of a completion elsewhere annihilates the ordinary conception of success and failure, as it brings out the intimations of a further life in the limitations here, and the positive need of doubt and the sense of incompleteness, which in some natures is essential to their development.

So far I have endeavoured to express in a necessarily rapid and incomplete summary, what appears to me to be the general groundwork of the poet's religious views; though within the limits of an article it has been impossible even

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<sup>1</sup> *Pippa Passes.*

to attempt to show their most characteristic development in his theories of love. For those conversant with his poems I venture to think that illustrations will have risen at every turn to their memories; though it is rather on the sum total of impressions left by his writings that I would rely for confirmation of my views of his meaning, than on any definite selections, however adequate.

No final judgment, as we have seen, is possible in this life, of its failure or success, nor any adequate conception of its place in the scheme of being. Far less can we conceive of God, and it is only through those attributes which are appreciable by man's finite nature, that we can approach him.

Of these, two stand out clearly in Browning's writings, and it is here that he comes most nearly into touch with Christianity, and his own individual faith seems to blend and become almost one with it. God, then, we find according to the poet, has manifested himself to man as Power and Love. The one is inconceivable, the other the mysterious vital key-stone of the arch between God and man. And even here the universal law of progress has held good. At first man could but see, and bend beneath the might of power, yet "past mind's conception—power." And this the poet shows is inevitable. We see and feel it everywhere, but, do we seek to understand it as it is manifested even in its smallest works, the bird, the worm, the beast, we "cower back from the search."

Knowledge has laid a load on man's mind, prostrate before the loveless Power it ever tries vainly to withstand. "Ever resistless fact" lies before us, compelling our awe, our admiration, but not our love. No more, says Browning, can the clay withstand the Potter, than

Can the whelmed mind disobey  
Knowledge, the cataract.

All is effect of cause:  
As it would, has willed and done  
Power: and my mind's applause  
Goes, passing laws each one,  
To Omnipotence, Lord of laws.

Head praises, but heart refrains  
From loving's acknowledgments.<sup>1</sup>

And then into this word of force before which man and his poor life shrink and dwindle into protesting nothingness, has come a new and stronger power, Love. This was the sudden

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<sup>1</sup> *Reverie in Asolando.*



vision which since it "was made flesh and dwelt among us," has transformed not only the life here, but all else besides. This, which, did we understand it more fully, is only another aspect of power, is the same, made perfect, "come full into play." It was a prophetic vision of such divine love, beyond the resistless fact, and yet one with it, which rose in David's breast with his own yearning love and pity for the stricken soul of King Saul, whom no promised renewal of earthly power and grandeur could comfort. David had seen the power of God everywhere—

I but open my eyes,—and perfection, no more and no less,  
In the kind I imagined, full fronts me, and God is seen God  
In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul, and the clod.

This he *sees*, but within him rises that divine overflow of love and pity, in which he recognises something of an invisible presence, which unites him suddenly and mysteriously, but, as his whole soul attests, eternally, with God himself. He recognises from his own finite love the infinity of love and power, and their union in the Godhead. He has sought to

Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul, the mistake,  
Saul, the failure, the ruin he seems now,—and bid him awake  
From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find himself set  
Clear and safe in new light and new life,—a new harmony yet  
To be run, and continued, and ended—who knows?—or endure!  
The man taught enough by life's dream, of the rest to make sure;  
By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning intensified bliss,  
And the next world's reward and repose, by the struggles in this.

This he has sought by the might of his love and its "impotent yearning" to accomplish, and it brings the vision of love perfected.

Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou—so wilt thou!  
So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown—  
And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down  
One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no breath,  
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue with death!  
As thy love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved  
Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being beloved!  
He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand the  
most weak.  
'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that I seek  
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be  
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,  
Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever: A Hand like this hand  
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ  
stand!

We turn from this rapture of new faith and knowledge to

another picture which the poet gives us. And here he speaks of Lazarus ; Lazarus raised from the dead,

Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing heaven,<sup>1</sup>

and treading the more perplexedly his earthly path for it.  
He is

Professedly the faultier that he knows  
God's secret.

He simply waits in prone submission for death to restore his equilibrium : " premature full growth " having come to him. As we read the touching picture which the Arab physician draws of him, some of the already noticed points of Browning's theory of life will revert to our minds : such as the necessity for incompleteness and uncertainty, and their naturalness in this life. But the whole picture is shown in its touching details only to turn us with a sudden powerful movement back upon the mind of the Arab physician, who excusing his detailed account of the man's life on the ground that it is valuable as illustrating one form of epilepsy, suddenly breaks from his critical attitude, and lets the consuming wonder that holds him, as he stands on the threshold of a new truth, have vent—

The very God ! think, Abib : dost thou think ?  
So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too—  
So through the thunder comes a human voice  
Saying, " O heart I made, a heart beats here !  
Face my hands fashioned, see it in myself !  
*Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of mine,*  
*But love I gave thee, with myself to love,*  
And thou must love me who have died for thee !

The Christian doctrine of man's redemption, by love and sacrifice, could hardly find a higher expression.

We shall find a somewhat different treatment in " A Death in the Desert." Here the ancient dying Apostle John becomes prophetically conscious of the new doubts which would be born into the world, as David before him had foreseen the new faith. He who leaned upon the breast of Jesus, now hears men question, not only whether Christ himself ever lived, but whether he, John, " was at all." His mode of answering is most instructive and interesting. First he does not re-assert the facts as things he has *seen* ; he admits that influenced by physical fear he has even denied them once in Christ's lifetime, so how can he judge those who deny what

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<sup>1</sup> *The Epistle of Karshish.*

they never saw? Let "the proofs shift" he seems to say, man will be "tested" so. The real denial which leads to death is of the inward truth, once apprehended by the soul. And there he leaves off contesting about the seen fact altogether, and reverts to the only method by which man apprehends truth—*i.e.*, by the principle of growth and progress within his own consciousness—

I say that man was made to grow, not stop;  
That help, he needed once, and needs no more,  
Having grown but an inch by, is withdrawn:  
For he hath new needs, and new helps to these.  
This imports solely, man should mount on each  
New height in view; the help whereby he mounts,  
The ladder-rung his foot has left, may fall,  
Since all things suffer change save God the Truth.  
Man apprehends Him newly at each stage  
Whereat earth's ladder drops, its service done;  
And nothing shall prove twice what once was proved.

Thus, a real living truth once apprehended, he stays asserting "proofs" no longer, but goes on to the next. "This," John adds, "might be pagan teaching; now hear mine." He however himself goes on to show that, the need for miracles having ceased, they, or their appearance, ceased also; faith having grown and not needing longer to be compelled; that, when once the truth, involved in God becoming man, has been grasped by the soul, it must be *used*, not re-stated. And here, he again imagines himself questioned plainly and narrowly as to the *facts*. Did Christ live, die, rise again—is, in brief, the story true?

But the dying Apostle has got into a region of reality more vivid than any presentment of facts at any given moment of a life on earth. Such questions have no longer any meaning to the man to whom truth "*is* now, and ever shall be," to whom the vital essence of the Love of God has been, is, and will be

When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.

Why stop, he seems to ask, at any one stage of God's manifestation of himself? Accept each step, and pass on to the next.

God's gift was that man should conceive of truth  
And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake,  
As midway help till he reach fact indeed.

Man was obliged at first to learn by facts, as the brutes;

Next as man, obliged by his own mind,  
Bent, habit, nature, knowledge turned to law.

And the Apostle goes on to urge him to "reach the type," through a perpetual search after truth in the varying forms which rise with varying times, the truth that "shall make you free." And he adds—

If ye demur, this judgment on your head,  
Never to reach the ultimate, angels' law,  
Indulging every instinct of the soul  
There where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing!

Whether he speaks through the mouth of the aged Apostle, or the ancient Rabbi, we find Browning conceives of truth as being definitely spiritual, at harmony with itself, and manifesting itself through an endless progress of development. It is difficult not to accept as the poet's personal expression, the lines—

. . . Praise be Thine!  
I see the whole design,  
I, who saw power, see now Love perfect too :  
Perfect I call Thy plan :  
Thanks that I was a man !  
Maker, remake, complete,—I trust what Thou shalt do !<sup>1</sup>

Or again in the "Reverie" he seems to sum up his expression of faith :

Then life is—to wake not sleep,  
Rise and not rest, but press  
From earth's level where blindly creep  
Things perfected more or less,  
To the heaven's height, far and steep,  
  
Where, amid what strifes and storms  
May wait the adventurous quest,  
Power is Love—transports, transforms  
Who aspired from worst to best,  
Sought the soul's world, spurned the worms.  
  
I have faith such end shall be :  
From the first, Power was—I knew.  
Life has made clear to me  
That, strive but for closer view,  
Love were as plain to see.  
  
When see ? When there dawns a day,  
If not on the homely earth,  
Then yonder, worlds away,  
Where the strange and new have birth,  
And Power comes full in play.<sup>2</sup>

Let such as are interested in the matter decide for themselves whether or no they can fit Browning into the ranks

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<sup>1</sup> *Rabbi Ben Ezra.*

<sup>2</sup> *Asolando*, p. 154.

of pure Theism or Christianity; his large humanity and extraordinary power of intellectual sympathy made it possible for him to recognise the same truth under many forms, and share in many of its expressions. I would rather think of him as a leader and fellow-comrade to all those who "seek after God," and say in the words of his own *Pompilia*—<sup>1</sup>

Through such souls alone  
God stooping shows sufficient of His light  
For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise.

MARIAN VON GLEHN.

## II.—BROWNING'S THEOLOGY.

There is at the first blush a superficial resemblance between a poet and a theologian. Both the one and the other give formal expression in accurate phraseology to some of our profoundest feelings. The poet, as well as the theologian, expresses explicitly what we feel most deeply. The theologian, equally with the poet, deals with the ideals of life, and especially the architectonic ideals that organise life and make it, or should make it, one vast grand poem. A little more harping on the same string, and especially a little more mixture of metaphors, and it would not be difficult to make out a good case for calling poet, priest, and theologian, poet writ large.

But when we come to the mode in which the poet and the theologian respectively give expression to the ideal elements within us, all these resemblances vanish at once. Think for a moment what is implied in the formal expression which a poet and a theologian respectively would give of the yearning after immortality. While the artist in words and moods would endeavour so to express the yearning as to invoke in his reader the same feeling that moves him with all its *nuances* of hope and doubt, rapture and shrinking, the theologian will be thinking under which section of what chapter of his *Treatise on Eschatology* the subject will most logically be introduced. For the theologian as such appeals, or at least ought to appeal, solely to the reason, whereas the poet has the whole diapason of human nature to work upon.

<sup>1</sup> *The Ring and the Book.*

I seem to have cut away the ground beneath my own feet, if the thing be possible and the metaphor allowable, in thus distinguishing so sharply the respective functions of poet and theologian. If they be so distinct, how treat of Browning's theology, on which I am to speak a few words from the Jewish point of view? But Browning, in this as in so many things, struck out a new line for himself. Regardless of the canon that a poet cannot be a theologian, he wrote theological poems in which the reasoning is at least as close and certainly as difficult to follow as that of many professed theologians. It is true they are mostly in dramatic form; instead of discussing anthropomorphism or fetishism, he gave us *Caliban on Setebos*; instead of answering Strauss directly, he wrote *Christmas Eve* and *Easter Day*; instead of writing an essay on miracles, he pictures for us Karshish's reflections on the case of Lazarus. It is not, however, so difficult as one might think to penetrate beneath the mask of the *dramatis personæ* and gain access to the thoughts of Robert Browning himself on the higher problems and obscurest difficulties of life. It is these that constitute him a theologian in the strict sense of the word, and should enable us to place the poet in one or other of the categories into which the theologians of the day may be divided.

In one case, indeed, Browning drops the mask of impersonation altogether, and speaks out on a theological subject of great importance. Stirred to the inmost depths by the sudden death of a friend, he discusses at some length in *La Saisiaz* the question of the immortality of the soul. Interesting as his treatment is, it scarcely comes within the scope of these remarks to consider it. For the dogma of immortality is one of natural religion, one common to all the creeds (except perhaps Buddhism). It is not more Jewish than Christian, Moslem than Greek, and in seeking to define Robert Browning's relation to Judaism, we must deal with the dogmas more distinctive of the creeds, and consider his attitude towards them, and its relation to that of other religious thinkers of his time.

His opinions show him to have been a member of the Broad Church School, as represented by Dean Stanley and the men of *Essays and Reviews*. A certain amount of sympathy is shown with what used to be known as German neologism, which in *Christmas Eve* is regarded as being even one of the ways of knowing Christ. But at the same time the inadequateness of the rationalistic attitude towards the Divinity of Christ is also insisted upon, and the assumption is

left that this, with all its consequences, the Incarnation and the Atonement, must be accepted by faith, if not to be definitely established by reason. Throughout this poem, the figure of Christ appears in such a form as would be impossible without a thorough faith in his Divinity. It must therefore be owned that so far as the evidence of his works goes, the jubilation of the orthodox Christian over the faith of Browning is to a certain extent justified, and there is little or no reason to suppose, as some Jewish students of the poet have thought, that his creed was a pure monotheism with a rejection of the Incarnation. Browning's theology was distinctively Christian, and in no way can be said to approximate to Judaism on the chief point that separates the two religions.

At the same time, outside *Christmas Eve* very little stress is laid on the influence of the Mediator in the spiritual life, the practical side by which the Divinity of Christ is made operative in the Christian life. But herein Browning is only at one with the rest of the Broad Church who tend to attenuate the function of mediation till Christ becomes little more than the spiritual brother in God, and Christ-worship becomes practically impossible. Another tendency which he likewise shares with the school of thought with which I am identifying him is the practical disappearance of the third person of the Trinity from his theology. Except in such vague form as "God's Spirit" or the "Spirit of Love" there is scarcely any reference to the Holy Spirit in his writings.

Speaking generally then, Browning's theology is that of the Broad Church with all its catholicity, but also with all its vagueness, and its want of touch with the practical religious life. So far as Browning's thought on religious matter seems Jewish, it is because of its Broad Church tone. In a fuller treatment of the subject it would be necessary, as it would be interesting, to discuss from a Jewish point of view the whole Broad Church movement, before determining how far Browning approximates to the Jewish position. In many Jewish circles it was thought, and is still thought, that the Broad Church was a tendency in Christianity towards Judaism. This is, however, erroneous; it is a tendency towards Unitarianism, not towards Judaism, as indeed both Mr. Voysey and Mr. Stopford Brooke have practically shown. Now, however much we may differ as to what Judaism is, and of recent years we have agreed to differ exceedingly, there is one point on which we are all agreed. Judaism is differentiated from Unitarianism by an additional element which may be called either racial or historical. The practical recog-

nition of God in History, and of a divine mission for Israel is a necessary part of Judaism according to all schools, however much they may differ as to the mode of operation of the Divine Spirit in men's affairs, or as to the exact character of the function Israel is to play in order to fulfil the designs of that Spirit. It is this quality that makes Judaism, which, at first sight, seems so akin to Unitarianism, on closer investigation turn out to show a closer kinship with the Roman Catholic Church, as is after all only natural, as their historical relationship is really that of mother and daughter.

The Broad Church is singularly unsusceptible to the claims of History and of development in religion, and Browning shares in this quality of his school. Indeed he extends this unsympathy with the conception of history as a divine process so far as to limit very much his general poetic treatment of historic subjects. For a poet who dealt so much with the past as he did, there is singularly little of the nationalist point of view of treating history. I mean the conception that nations, just as religions, have their main function in the creation of specific types of human character. Considering that he lived so much in Italy when her noblest elements were most deeply imbued with this conception, considering also that Mrs. Browning had the deepest sympathy with it, it is curious how very little there is in Browning that strikes the patriotic or nationalist note. Here again he chimes in with the general sentiments of his school of religious thought, who have been cosmopolitan to a fault.

Perhaps the most distinctive point in Browning's teaching is the view which I have elsewhere ventured to sum up in the formula "Aspiration is achievement" (*Athenæum*, Dec. 21st, 1889, p. 859). This, as applied to theology, would perhaps lead to one of the most striking doctrines of the Broad Church in one of its more recent developments. I refer to Dr. Abbot's remarkable view of the religious use of illusion as leading on to higher forms of truth. From a Jewish point of view, this is of interest, as chiming in with Mainonides' conception of Christianity and Islam being two forms of useful illusion that will lead on to Judaism. But there is no evidence that Browning shared Dr. Abbot's view, and for this reason I have affiliated him with the school of Stanley.

Hitherto in regarding Browning as a theologian of the Broad Church School we have been dealing rather with the points in which he and his school, or rather his school and he, differ from the Jewish way of looking at things religious. But there remains one other point besides the tendency to Unitarianism wherein the Broad Church approaches Judaism,



as Jews have every reason to know and be thankful for. With all its vagueness of doctrine and attenuation of dogma, the Broad School has been ever honourably distinguished by its toleration both in theory and practice. Both in eschatology and in the doctrine of sin, Judaism and the Broad Church are at one in declaring a man's deeds, and not his creed, to be the criterion of his claims to the higher life both here and hereafter. Here universalism and nationalism are at one.

It is here of course that Browning's Jewish poems come in as part of his general theological attitude, and it may be of interest to review those that deal most directly with Jewish subjects. "Holy Cross Day" puts with considerable humour the case against conversion in the form of a Roman Jew's soliloquy while attending but not listening to a sermon which the Jews of the Ghetto were forced to endure once a year. No Jew could wish to have the *Apologia pro domo suâ* put with more force than in the ringing lines in which the poet makes his Rabbi address the Christ—

O thou, if that martyr-gash  
Fell on thee coming to take thine own,  
And we gave the Cross, when we owed the Throne—

Thou art the Judge. We are bruised thus.  
But, the judgment over, join sides with us !  
Thine too is the cause ! and not more thine  
Than ours, is the work of these dogs and swine,  
Whose life laughs through and spits at their creed,  
Who maintain thee in word, and defy thee in deed.

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By the torture, prolonged from age to age,  
By the infamy, Israel's heritage,  
By the Ghetto's plague, by the garb's disgrace,  
By the badge of shame, by the felon's place,  
By the branding tool, the bloody whip,  
And the summons to Christian fellowship,—

We boast our proof that at least the Jew  
Would wrest Christ's name from the Devil's crew.

Another less well known poem of toleration is that entitled "Filippo Baldunecchi on the Privilege of Burial," telling how a petty-minded painter annoyed the Jews by putting up a picture of the Virgin overlooking their graveyard, and when he had agreed to remove it for a consideration, replacing it by one of the Crucifixion. At last the Jews buy both pictures, on the plea that they may have them in their possession, just as a Christian would not scruple to have one of Venus or of Zeus. The scorn of the Jews at Baldunecchi's

action, and the meanness shown by it is heightened by their dignified and lofty rebuke at being plagued even in their graves.

Death's luxury we now rehearse  
While, living, through your streets we fare,  
And take your hatred : nothing worse  
Have we, once dead and safe, to bear.

Another slight poem of Browning's, never printed, I believe, in any of his works—it appeared in *The Keepsake*, 1856—expands a well-known saying of the "Ethics of the Fathers":

#### BEN KARSHOOK'S WISDOM.

##### I.

Would a man 'scape the rod,  
Rabbi Ben Karshook saith,  
"See that he turn to God  
The day before his death."  
  
"Ay, could a man inquire  
When it shall come?" I say,  
The Rabbi's eye shoots fire,  
"Then let him turn to-day!"

##### II.

Quoth a young Sadducee,  
"Reader of many rolls,  
Is it so certain we  
Have, as they tell us, souls?"  
  
"Son, there is no reply!"  
The Rabbi bit his beard,  
"Certain, a soul have I—  
We may have none," he sneer'd.

Thus Karshook, the Hiram's Hammer  
The Right-hand Temple-column  
Taught babes in grace their grammar  
And struck the simple, solemn.

Browning's toleration is shown in even a higher way than in these direct attacks on intolerance. It cannot have been by accident that he chose to give two of the most important summaries of his *Weltweisheit* by means of Jewish speakers, "Rabbi Ben Ezra" and "Jochanan Hakkadosh." "Rabbi Ben Ezra" is by many considered Browning's most striking poem, and certainly it yields to none of his in dignity and lucidity. It is of peculiar interest to English Jews as the eponymous hero is Abraham ibn Ezra, who was himself in England, "the island of the corner of the earth" (a pun on *Angle terre*) as he calls it, in the spring and summer of 1158. It is scarcely likely that Browning knew more of him than that he was a distinguished Rabbi of the Middle Ages. Certainly the poem has none of those satiric touches with which Abraham ibn Ezra's name is associated in the mind of the student of Jewish literature. Nothing can be more dignified and stoical than the soliloquy of the old Rabbi reviewing life, and seeing that it is very good both in youth, with its pleasure, and in age, with its experience. The image of the

Potter and the Wheel, hackneyed as it has been by the homilists, has never been more finely utilised than in the concluding lines of the poem. Man as clay in the making is thus addressed—

What though the earlier grooves  
Which ran the laughing loves  
Around thy base, no longer pause and press?  
What though, about thy rim,  
Sculled-things in order grim  
Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress?

Look not thou down, but up!  
To uses of a cup,  
The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,  
The new wine's foaming flow,  
The Master's lips a-glow!  
Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what need'st thou with  
earth's wheel?

But I need, now as then,  
Thee, God, who moulded men!  
And since, not even while the whirl was worst,  
Did I, to the wheel of life  
With shapes and colours rife,  
Bound dizzily,—mistake my end, to slake Thy thirst.

So, take and use Thy work,  
Amend what flaws may lurk,  
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!  
My times be in Thy hand!  
Perfect the cup as planned!  
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!

There remain a number of poems which go even further than toleration of the Jewish life and creed. They imply a certain sympathy with Jewish ways of thought and fancy, and a certain acquaintance, though not a very profound one, with Rabbinic literature. These are chiefly contained in the volume called *Jocoseria*. This contains one of the Midrashic legends of the Queen of Sheba, though diluted through Arabic sources, as is indicated by the title "Solomon and Balkis." It is scarcely more than a *jeu d'esprit*.

The most important of these poems is, however, the legend of "Jochanan Hakkadosh," a sort of Rabbinic Hagada on the theme "Unless ye be as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." The great Rabbi Jochanan, on the point of dying, has a year of additional life granted him by the expedient of certain younger men giving up three months of their lives to the venerated sage. He lives their life, and thus at the height of his wisdom is enabled to judge of the

value of their various occupations. "Vanity of Vanity" is the refrain four times in succession, as his disciple Tsaddik visited Jochanan, after he had lived three months the life of a married lover, a warrior, a poet and a statesman. But by accident some little child had also pressed upon the sage three months of its life, and this additional experience harmonizes all the discrepancies of the others, and allows the sage to depart in peace and assured that life is not vain.

Attached to "Jochanan Hakkadosh" are three sonnets on the well known Talmudic *Lügenmärchen*, to use the folk-lore term, of the legend of Og's bones and bedstead. They are said to be from a work *משך של רבים בדים* which I need scarcely say neither exists nor could exist under such a title. Much head breaking has been caused by the bad Hebrew of the title, but Browning would probably have given the Johnsonian explanation of "Ignorance, madam, ignorance." As some indication of the slightness of his acquaintance with Hebrew idiom, I may mention that he was going to call his Jochanan "Hakkadosh Jochanan" (=John Saint). Through a common friend I pointed out the error to the poet, and the adjective was put in its proper position. The fact seems to be that Browning could read his Hebrew Bible, and that was about the extent of his Hebrew learning, though it was a foible of his to give an impression of recondite learning.

But it is not in the minutiae of Hebrew scholarship that we are to look for Browning's sympathy with the Jewish spirit. This comes out in the lines I have been quoting and in his poems of toleration. That this sympathy was not due to any agreement with the characteristic features of Jewish faith is, I think, undoubted. All the more honour to the poet who could rise above differences of creed and pierce to the human nature which is common to Christian and Jew because it is the gift of a Common Father.

JOSEPH JACOBS.

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NOTE.—The following passages in some recently published correspondence of Browning throw interesting light on his attitude to Jewish questions:—"The two Hebrew quotations (put in to give a grave look to what is mere fun and invention) being translated amount to—1st, 'A Collection of many lies'; and the 2nd is an old saying: 'From Moses to Moses arose none like Moses.' . . . . The Hebrew quotations are put in for a purpose, as a direct acknowledgment that certain doctrines may be found in the Old Book, which the Concocters of Novel Schemes of Morality put forth as discoveries of their own."